



The Assumption of Mary into Heaven according to Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI: Biblical Foundations and Eschatological Themes

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When Pope Pius XII solemnly defined the dogma of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven on November 1, 1950, Joseph Ratzinger was studying theology at the Georgianum in Munich¹. The dogma reads: “The Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into

¹ On the theological views of his teachers, see J. RATZINGER, *Milestones. Memoires 1927-1977*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1998, 58-59: “Before Mary’s bodily Assumption into heaven was defined, all theological faculties in the world were consulted for their opinion. Our teachers’ answer was emphatically negative. What here became evident was the one-sidedness, not only of the historical, but also of the historicist method in theology. ‘Tradition’ was identified with what could be proved on the basis of texts. Altaner, the patrologist from Würzburg (who also had come from Breslau), had proven in a scientifically persuasive manner that the doctrine of Mary’s bodily Assumption into heaven was unknown before the fifth century; this doctrine, therefore, he argued, could not belong to the ‘apostolic tradition’. And this was his conclusion, which my teachers at Munich shared. This argument is compelling if you understand ‘tradition’ strictly as the handing down of fixed formulas and texts. This was the position that our teachers represented. But if you conceive of ‘tradition’ as the living process of truth whereby the Holy Spirit introduces us to the fullness of truth and teaches us how to understand what previously we could still not grasp (cf. Jn 16:12-13), then subsequent ‘remembering’ (cf. Jn 16:4, for instance) can come to recognize what it had not caught sight of previously and yet was already handed down in the original Word. But such a perspective was still quite unattainable by German theological thought”.

heavenly glory”². Although Ratzinger’s writings on the Assumption are relatively few in number, when seen against the backdrop of his eschatology, they are seen to contain important insights into the foundations and consequences of the dogma. As Pope, Ratzinger has had the opportunity to preach seven times on Mary’s Assumption, often building on insights he proposed as a theologian.

In this article, I first expound Ratzinger’s thought on five New Testament biblical foundations for the dogma of the Assumption. I then consider three eschatological themes connected with the dogma of the Assumption: the relationship between God and Heaven, Christ’s Ascension into Heaven, and the Resurrection of the Body. I end with a summary of several theological conclusions about Mary’s Assumption: for example, the meaning of “assumed body and soul”, the Assumption as the highest form of veneration-canonization, and the relationship between the Assumption and Mary’s maternal mediation.

1. Biblical Foundations

1.1 “In Christ Jesus, he has enthroned us with him” (Ephesians 2:6)

In *God and the World: A Conversation with Peter Seewald* (2000), Cardinal Ratzinger was asked about the meaning of the dogma of the Assumption. In his response, he first refers to our human limitations in thinking about heaven and about bodies in heaven³. He admits, though, that he is helped by Saint Paul’s theology of baptism: “God has raised us up with Jesus, and in Christ Jesus he has enthroned us with him in the heavenly realm” (Ephesians 2:6). What the dogma of the Assumption says is that “in Mary’s case what baptism ensures for us all, that is, dwelling ‘enthroned’ with God ‘in heaven’ (God is heaven!), has already been put into effect for Mary. Baptism (being united with Christ) has achieved its full effect”⁴. Our union with the

² PIUS XII, Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*, n. 44, November 1, 1950: “Immaculatam Deiparam semper Virginem Mariam, expleto terrestris vitae cursu, fuisse corpore et anima ad caelestem gloriam assumptam”.

³ J. RATZINGER, *God and the World: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2000, 305: “This dogma [of the Assumption] is obviously especially difficult, for all of us, because we cannot imagine heaven. And still less can we imagine some kind of body being located there. Seen in this way, the dogma poses a challenge to our understanding of what is meant by heaven, by body”.

⁴ J. RATZINGER, *God and the World...*, 305.

risen Christ is imperfect and inadequate; Mary's union, on the contrary, lacks nothing since she has entered into full communion with Christ: "And part of this community is another corporal identity, which we cannot imagine. In brief: the essential point of this dogma is that Mary is wholly with God, entirely with Christ, completely a 'Christian'"⁵.

The text from Ephesians opens up to aspects that concern our immortality and resurrection as men. This was brought out in Ratzinger's dogmatic treatise, *Eschatology* (1977), where he reflects on the passage from Ephesians and notes that the soul is man's capacity for relatedness with truth and eternal love. We participate in God's eternity remaining in communion with him. God's dialogue with us (a sharing of the *theo-logos*) takes on flesh in Christ. Since we belong to the body of Christ, we are united to the flesh and body of the Resurrected One and, beginning with our baptism, are in this sense already attached to our future⁶. Ratzinger notes that man, as a created being, "is made for a relationship which entails indestructibility"⁷. In this way, the vision of God, which Mary now enjoys, is part and parcel of man's very being. According to Ratzinger, Man's relatedness and capacity for relatedness to God makes him immortal, a characteristic which belongs to him by nature. Man's spiritual nature is constituted by a communication of the Creator's, and this communication "both establishes the creature in its own right and makes it a genuine participant in the being of the One communicated"⁸. Our immortality, then, rests upon a relationship in which we share, but by which, in sharing it, we are claimed by God in turn. Ratzinger concludes: "If the human capacity for truth and for love is the place where eternal life can break forth, then eternal life can be consciously experienced in the present"⁹.

1.2 "In Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21-25)

Pope Benedict XVI's homily on the Assumption in 2010 refers to another biblical text which highlights the connection of the Assumption to both Christ's Resurrection and the theology of Baptism. Saint

⁵ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁶ See J. RATZINGER, *Eschatology*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC 2007², xxi.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:21-24: "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ, the first fruits, then at his coming, those who belong to Christ". The text, according to Benedict, sheds light on the mystery of the Assumption since it is by immersion in Christ's Paschal Mystery that we are enabled to share in his victory over sin and death. The first, biological incorporation in Adam, the first man and the old man, generates death and thus we share in the heredity of suffering and sin. The second, new incorporation into the risen Christ, into the new man, gives us the life of the Resurrection and this is given to us in Baptism. From this, Benedict concludes that what Saint Paul says of all human beings, the Church says of Mary:

She is so deeply integrated into Christ's Mystery that at the end of her earthly life she already participates with her whole self in her Son's Resurrection. She lives what we await at the end of time when the "last enemy" death will have been destroyed (1 Cor 15:26); she already lives what we proclaim in the Creed: "We look for the Resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come"¹⁰.

Mary overcame death and is already triumphant in heavenly glory, in the totality of her being, in body and soul.

This same point is made in Benedict's 2009 homily on the Assumption. Referring once again to Ephesians 2:6, he points out that through our Baptism we have already been raised and are seated in the heavenly places in Jesus Christ, "but we must physically attain what was previously begun and brought about in Baptism. In us, union with Christ's resurrection is incomplete, but for the Virgin Mary it is complete, despite the journey that Our Lady also had to make"¹¹. Mary, then, has entered into the fullness of union with God, with her Son. In her, we contemplate the one who was granted to share with her soul and her body in Christ's definitive victory over death¹².

¹⁰ BENEDICT XVI, Homily, August 15, 2010: *AAS* 102 (2010), 533.

¹¹ BENEDICT XVI, Homily, August 15, 2009: *AAS* 101 (2009), 774.

¹² See *Ibid.*, 774. See also A. NICHOLS, *The Thought of Benedict XVI*, Burns & Oates, New York 2005, 202-203: "In [Mary], death is swallowed up by the victory of her Son. Through bearing him who is the death of death, her divine Motherhood already points to her Assumption: 'from this birth comes only life, not death'. By her entry into glory, the Church's *promised* certitude of salvation becomes its *bodily* certitude also. In celebrating this feast, the Lucan commission to 'call be blessed' is put into supreme effect".

1.3 "Blessed is she who believed" (Luke 1:45)

The foundation of Mary's anticipated victory over death is found in her faith and obedience to the Word of God and in her total abandonment to the divine action and initiative¹³. This point is brought out in Ratzinger's book *Daughter Zion* (1977), when considers the historical development of the dogma in relation to the Church's veneration for Mary. He writes that Mary's Assumption into heavenly glory, unlike Jesus' Resurrection is not to be considered as the historical tradition of an historical fact. Rather, the content of the article of faith concerning the Assumption is a theological and not an historical affirmation¹⁴.

Looking at the dogma's historical development and the factors in its formulation shows that the driving force behind the declaration was that of veneration: the dogma owes its origin, impetus and goal more to an act of homage than to its content. The dogma was promulgated for the honor of the Son, the glorification of Mary, and the joy of the entire Church: "The dogmatic proclamation was an act of Marian veneration in the form of a dogmatic statement"; it was "intended to be a liturgy of faith"¹⁵. The dogma's content is entirely oriented to veneration, yet the veneration inversely made use of this content as its foundation. The veneration refers to one who is alive and has actually arrived at her goal on the other side of death. "The formula of the Assumption makes explicit what veneration presupposes"¹⁶: life with the Lord. Veneration only has meaning if the object of veneration is alive and has attained their goal. The dogma of the Assumption, in this sense, is simply the highest degree of canonization, in which the predicate 'saint' is recognized in the strictest sense, namely, being in eschatological fulfillment.

The biblical context which supports the declaration, as highest degree of veneration, is found in the Gospel passage which prophesies and requires veneration for Mary: "Behold, from henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48). In recording this, Luke pre-

¹³ The aspect of faith was brought out in Ratzinger's discussion of the resurrection in *Eschatology*. Ratzinger quotes Mark 13:7: "He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live", and comments that the bond with Jesus is, even now, resurrection. "Faith, which is the contact between Jesus and myself, vouchsafes here and now the crossing of death's frontier" (p. 117).

¹⁴ J. RATZINGER, *Daughter Zion*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1983, 72.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

supposes that there was already praise of Mary in the Church of his time. "Blessed are you who have believed" (Luke 1:45)¹⁷. Mary has achieved her goal on the other side of death and in the dogma of the Assumption, her conquest of death is presented in the highest, ultimate, eschatological form. This is so because the name of Mary stands for the Church itself, for the Church's definitive state of salvation¹⁸. The title of "Mother of God" points to the Assumption since from this birth comes life and not death. In connection with the Immaculate Conception, we have the totality of grace and the totality of salvation. Grace exists not in a fractured state, and thus death, sin's jailer, has no place¹⁹.

Mary's Assumption of body and soul into heavenly glory means that Mary, who stands for the Church in its definitive state of salvation, does not await, but rather actually lives the fulfillment of the promise. Returning once again to Ephesians 2:6, Ratzinger points out that Baptism is a participation in Jesus' Ascension and his Resurrection: the baptized person is already included in the Ascension and lives his hidden life there in the elevated Lord. In this light, the proclamation of the Assumption is the highest form of canonization. Mary, Saint Augustine notes, gave birth to the Lord "with her heart before her body". Reflecting on this affirmation, Ratzinger states that faith, the interior substance of Baptism according to Luke 1:45, can be predicated of Mary "without restriction, realizing in her the very quintessence of Baptism"²⁰. In Mary, everything still resisting Baptism (such as death) has been conquered without remainder. By integrating Luke 1:45 and Ephesians 2:6 in reference to Mary, we see that she who is wholly baptized is "at the same time not merely the Church's promised certitude of salvation but its bodily certitude also. The Church is already saved in her: the new Israel is no more to be rejected. It has already ascended into heaven"²¹.

The connection between Mary's Assumption and veneration was reiterated in Benedict's 2006 homily: the Church's veneration of Mary is not an invention, but rather a response to the Holy Spirit's com-

¹⁷ See J. RATZINGER, "The Sign of the Woman", in *Mary: God's Yes to Man*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1988, 24: "Mary's nature, however, and her life are essentially determined by her faith. 'Blessed is she who believed' (Luke 1:45); this acclamation by Elizabeth addressed to Mary becomes the key concept in Mariology".

¹⁸ J. RATZINGER, *Daughter Zion*, 76.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

mand, a response to a prophesy made by Mary that “Henceforth, all generations will be me blessed”. The Church praises Mary because she is blessed forever; she is blessed because she is united to God and lives with God and in God. Through her “*Fiat*”, “Mary prepared God’s dwelling here on earth; with her body and soul, she became his dwelling place and thereby opened the earth to heaven”²². As God’s dwelling place on earth in the Incarnation, Mary is the true Ark of the Covenant; in Mary the mystery of the Temple – the inhabitation of God here on earth – is fulfilled; Mary becomes God’s tent. “She had made room for the Lord in her soul and thus really became the true Temple where God made himself incarnate, where he became present on this earth”²³.

Thus, as God’s dwelling place on earth, the eternal dwelling place has already been prepared in her. And this constitutes the whole content of the Dogma of the Assumption of Mary, body and soul, into heavenly glory, expressed here in these words. Mary is “blessed” because – totally, in body and soul and for ever – she became the Lord’s dwelling place²⁴.

Mary thus shows us how to become blessed and find the way to happiness. “Blessed is she who believed”: to believe is the first and fundamental act in order to become a dwelling place of God and find happiness.

Benedict’s homily from 2009 considers Mary’s obedience in following her Son. In a special way, the last stage of her earthly pilgrimage is an invitation to look at the manner in which she journeyed on toward the goal of glorious eternity. Her whole life, though, is an ascent:

By following Jesus from Bethlehem to exile in Egypt, in both his hidden and his public life and even to the foot of the Cross, Mary lives her constant ascent to God in the spirit of the *Magnificat*, fully adhering to God’s plan of love, even in moments of darkness and suffering, and nourishing in her heart total abandonment in the Lord’s hands²⁵.

²² BENEDICT XVI, Homily, August 15, 2006: *AAS* 98 (2006), 665.

²³ *Ibid.*, 666.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 666.

²⁵ BENEDICT XVI, Homily, August 15, 2009: *AAS* 101 (2009), 774.

The Assumption reminds us that Mary's life is a journey of following Jesus that has a very precise destination: "the definitive victory over sin and death and full communion with God, because as Paul says in his Letter to the Ephesians the Father 'raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (Ephesians 2:6)"²⁶. We must physically attain what was previously begun and brought about in Baptism: being raised and seated in the heavenly places in Christ. Mary's journey is complete as she has entered into the fullness of union with God, with her Son²⁷.

1.4 "The ark of his covenant was seen within his temple" (Revelation 11:19)

In 2011, Benedict considers Mary as the true ark of God's covenant. The connection between Mary and the Ark of the Covenant is hinted at in the opening chapter of Luke's Gospel: just as King David leapt before the Ark of the Covenant (2 Sam 6:16), so too does John the Baptist leap in the womb of Elizabeth before the true Ark of the Covenant (Luke 1:44). As Benedict writes:

In his mother's womb John the Baptist danced like David before the Ark of the Covenant; like David he recognized: Mary was the new Ark of the Covenant, before which the heart exults with joy, the Mother of God present in the world who does not keep this divine presence to herself but offers it, sharing the grace of God. Thus, – the prayer says – Mary really is the "*causa nostrae laetitiae*", the "Ark" in whom the Savior is truly present among us²⁸.

Thus, the symbol of ark in the Old Testament gives way to reality in the New Testament in a real person: Mary is the true Ark of the Covenant since the Son of God made man dwells within her. Just as the old ark contained the two tablets of the Mosaic Law, which outlines the conditions for conformity to God's will, Mary welcomes in

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 774.

²⁷ See *Ibid.*, 774-775: "In Mary taken up into Heaven we therefore contemplate the One who, through a unique privilege, was granted to share with her soul and her body in Christ's definitive victory over death. In the Virgin taken up into Heaven we contemplate the crowning of her faith, of that journey of faith which she points out to the Church and to each one of us: the One who, at every moment, welcomed the Word of God, is taken up into Heaven, in other words she herself is received by the Son in the 'dwelling place' which he prepared for us with his death and Resurrection (cf. Jn 14: 2-3)".

²⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Homily, August 15, 2011: *AAS* 103 (2011), 574.

herself the living Word, “the whole content of God’s will”. Mary carried “the One who is the new and eternal Covenant, which culminated in the offering of his Body and his Blood: a body and blood received through Mary²⁹”. The consequence of this is that she is destined to glory in an extraordinary way, “because she is so closely united to the Son whom she welcomed in faith and generated in the flesh, as to share fully in his glory in Heaven”³⁰.

1.5 “A woman clothed with the sun” (Revelation 12:1)

Cardinal Ratzinger, in his introduction to Pope John Paul II’s Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, reflected on the “Sign of the Woman” from the twelfth chapter of Revelation. The sign, he writes, appears “at a certain moment in history in order to determine from then on the interrelation of heaven and earth”³¹. Mary, who is “full of grace”, becomes a sign in history, a sign of hope that leads the way to hope: “The sign of the woman reveals God’s favor toward humanity, a favor more powerful than all manifestation of evil and sin, all that ‘enmity’ that constantly shaped the course of human history”³². The meaning of the image of the woman clothed with the sun (Revelation 12:1) was dealt with in Benedict’s 2007 homily. Being “clothed with the sun” means that Mary was totally clothed with God and living totally in God, surrounded and penetrated by God’s light. Having “twelve stars for a crown” means that she was surrounded by the twelve tribes of Israel, by the whole People of God and the Communion of Saints. The moon symbolizes death and morality and is beneath her feet. This means that “Mary has left death behind her; she is totally clothed in life; she is taken up body and soul into God’s glory”³³. Mary’s life was that of serving God as his handmaid; she offered her life as a gift of herself to God and to her neighbor. As the “woman clothed with the sun” Mary is the great sign of the victory of love, of the victory of goodness, of the victory of God; a great sign of consolation. “The Feast of the Assumption is an invitation to trust in God and also to im-

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 573.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 573.

³¹ See J. RATZINGER, “The Sign of the Woman”, 28.

³² JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Mater*, n. 11.

³³ BENEDICT XVI, Homily, August 15, 2007: *AAS* 99 (2007), 800.

itate Mary in what she herself said: Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; I put myself at the Lord's disposal"³⁴.

2. Eschatological Themes

2.1 *Heaven and Mary's Assumption*

In a homily from 1968 on Mary's Assumption, Ratzinger ponders the meaning of a human person being taken bodily into heaven. He points out that as used in connection with the dogma of the Assumption, "Heaven" does not refer a place somewhere beyond the stars, but something far greater: "'Heaven' means that God has a place for human beings and gives them an eternal existence"³⁵. God loves us and his thinking of us gives us our being. Our eternal life, then, is based on God's love and, what is more, is God's love. In him and his creative love we are preserved immortally and forever in being: "This love guarantees our immortality, and it is this love that we call 'heaven'"³⁶. Ratzinger is often very direct in equating "Heaven" with "God". In doing this, he wants to avoid his listeners thinking of Heaven in limited spatial-temporal terms or as an extra-historical place into which one enters. The essential point of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven is Mary's being wholly with God and with Christ³⁷.

Pope Benedict's first homily on the Assumption points out that the dogma tells us that there is room in God for the human body. With Mary's Assumption, Heaven is no longer a very remote sphere unknown to us: we have a mother in Heaven, Heaven is open, Heaven has a heart. "Mary is taken up body and soul into the glory of Heaven, and with God and in God she is Queen of Heaven and earth"³⁸. While Mary lived on earth, she could only be close to a few people; now, however, because she is with God and in God, Mary is close to each one of us:

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 801.

³⁵ J. RATZINGER, *Dogma and Preaching*, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago 1985, 116.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

³⁷ Heaven, as Ratzinger writes in *Eschatology*, must be determined Christologically: "Heaven's existence depends upon the fact that Jesus Christ, as God, is man, and makes space for human existence in the existence of God himself. One is in heaven when, and to the degree, that one is in Christ. It is by being with Christ that we find the true location of our existence as human beings in God" (p. 234).

³⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Homily, August 15, 2005: *AAS* 97 (2005), 877.

Being in God, who is close to us, actually, “within” all of us, Mary shares in this closeness of God. Being in God and with God, she is close to each one of us, knows our hearts, can hear our prayers, can help us with her motherly kindness and has been given to us, as the Lord said, precisely as a “mother” to whom we can turn at every moment³⁹.

Thus, Pope Benedict brings out the fact that with the Assumption, we are assured that in Heaven, being *with* God and *in* God, there is room for the body. Mary, taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven, is close to us because she participates in God’s closeness to us. In heaven, Mary hears our prayers and can help us precisely as a mother. As the Mother of the Son of God, Mary also participates in the power and goodness of the Son. Therefore, we can entrust the whole of our lives to her.

Pope Benedict’s 2010 homily also considers “Heaven” as not referring to a place in the universe, rather: “With this term ‘Heaven’ we wish to say that God, the God who made himself close to us, does not abandon us in or after death but keeps a place for us and gives us eternity. We mean that in God there is room for us”⁴⁰. It is his Love that triumphs over death and gives us eternity and it is this love that we call “Heaven”: God is so great that he also makes room for us. And Jesus the man, who at the same time is God, is the guarantee for us that the being-man and the being-God can exist and live, the one within the other, for eternity. God knows and loves the whole of what we are and welcomes into his eternity what is developing and becoming now in our life. “The whole of man, the whole of his life, is taken by God and, purified in him, receives eternity”⁴¹. The world to come, then, will be the fulfillment of this earth. We are called to build this new world and work so that it may become, one day, the “world of God”: “In Mary taken up into Heaven, who fully shares in the Resurrection of the Son, we contemplate the fulfillment of the human creature in accordance with ‘God’s world’”⁴².

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 878.

⁴⁰ BENEDICT XVI, Homily, August 15, 2010: *AAS* 102 (2010), 534.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 534.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 535.

2.2 Christ's Ascension into Heaven and Mary's Assumption

Ratzinger's *Introduction to Christianity* (1968) is an explanation of the Creed, and it provides him with the opportunity to develop an eschatological theme closely connected with the dogma of Mary's Assumption: that of Christ's Ascension into Heaven. Christ's Ascension points to "the possibility of contact with all other men through the medium of contact with the divine love itself, so that human existence can find its geometrical place, so to speak, inside God's own being"⁴³. Heaven, as fulfilled love, is that which can always only be granted – as a grace – to man, since heaven is, by nature, what one has not made oneself and cannot make oneself. Ratzinger argues convincingly that heaven and Christ's Ascension are indivisibly connected:

Heaven is not a place that, before Christ's Ascension, was barred off by a positive, punitive decree of God's, to be opened up one day in just as positive a way. On the contrary, the reality of heaven only comes into existence through the confluence of God and man. Heaven is to be defined as the contact of the being "man" with the being "God"; this confluence of God and man took place once and for all in Christ when he went beyond *bios* through death to new life. Heaven is accordingly that future of man and of mankind which the latter cannot give to itself, which is therefore closed to it so long as it waits for itself, and which was first and fundamentally opened up in the man whose field of existence was God and through whom God entered into the creature "man"⁴⁴.

Ratzinger presents the Resurrection and the Ascension as the final confluence of the being "man" with the being "God"; it is this confluence that offers man the possibility of everlasting existence. Ratzinger seeks to understand the two happenings (Resurrection and Ascension) "as love's being stronger than death and thus s the decisive 'mutation' of man and cosmos, in which the frontier of *bios* is broken down and a new field of existence created"⁴⁵.

The glorified Christ stands in a continuous posture of self-giving to his Father; he is the temple of the final age. Since he is heaven, the New Jerusalem, Jesus Christ is also the cultic space for God: "The ascending movement of humanity in its union with Christ is answered

⁴³ J. RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2004, 312.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 313-314.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 314.

by the descending movement of God's love in its self-gift to us. And so worship, in its heavenly, perfect form, entails an immediacy between God and man which knows of no setting asunder"⁴⁶. In Heaven, in the ultimate vision of God's essence, God totally permeates the whole man with his plenitude and his utter openness. God is "all in all", and thus the human person enters upon his boundless fulfillment Christ's exaltation and the entry of his humanity into the life of the triune God through the resurrection, "does not imply his departure from this world but a new mode of presence to the world"⁴⁷. Heaven means participation in this new mode of Christ's existence and thus the fulfillment of what baptism began in us. This is why Heaven escapes spatial determination, lying neither inside nor outside the space of our world. "Heaven means, much more, that power over the world which characterizes the new 'space' of the body of Christ, the communion of saints. Heaven is not, then, 'above' in a spatial but in an essential way"⁴⁸. Heaven is in itself eschatological reality. Creation is destined to become the vessel of God's Glory and to be drawn into eternal blessedness. Its definitiveness stems from the definitiveness of God's irrevocable and indivisible love. Creation is still under construction and Heaven will only be complete when all the members of the Lord's body are gathered in.

The homily on the Assumption in 2008 refers to Christ's Ascension and how Mary is the creature in whom the mystery of Christ "has already fully taken effect, redeeming her from death and conveying her, body and soul, to the Kingdom of immortal life"⁴⁹. The feast of the Assumption "impels us to lift our gaze to Heaven; not to a heaven consisting of abstract ideas or even an imaginary heaven created by art, but the Heaven of true reality which is God himself. God is Heaven. He is our destination, the destination and the eternal dwelling place from which we come and for which we are striving"⁵⁰. When Mary fell asleep in this world to reawaken in Heaven, "she simply followed her Son Jesus for the last time, on his longest and most crucial journey, his passage 'from this world to the Father' (cf. John 13:1). Like him, together with him, she departed this world to return 'to the

⁴⁶ J. RATZINGER, *Eschatology*, 234.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 236-237.

⁴⁹ BENEDICT XVI, Homily, August 15, 2008: *AAS* 100 (2008), 622.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Father's House' (cf. John 14: 2)"⁵¹. Mary, the new Eve, followed Jesus, the new Adam, in suffering and in the Passion, and so too in definitive joy: "Mary entered after her Son, associated with his Glory, after being associated with his Passion. She entered it with an uncontrollable force, keeping the way behind her open to us all"⁵². Faith enables us already to live in the dimension between finite and infinite; our life, then, is attracted towards the future, towards God, where Christ and Mary have preceded us⁵³.

2.3 *The Resurrection of the Body and Mary's Bodily Assumption*

The Resurrection of the Body, Ratzinger argues in *Introduction to Christianity*, implies a new heaven and a new earth in which there are "immortal bodies needing no sustenance and a completely different condition of matter"⁵⁴. In the Bible, the resurrection of the body is not reducible to the idea of a restoration of the body. In fact, Saint Paul "was decidedly opposed to the prevailing Jewish view whereby the risen body was completely identical with the earthly body and the world of the resurrection simply a continuation of the world of the present"⁵⁵. What we have is the possibility of contrasting the Adamic mode of the ensouled body with the Christological mode prefigured in the resurrection of Jesus, a corporeality stemming from the Holy Spirit. Hence, the newness of risen life comes from above not from below. The Resurrection of the Body (or the Flesh) indicates the salvation of the human creature in its entirety. The resurrection of the flesh "can mean that resurrection of the creature only if it also means the resurrection of the body"⁵⁶.

In Aquinas's interpretation of the formula *anima forma corporis*, both soul and body are realities only thanks to each other and as oriented towards each other. Though they are not identical, they are nevertheless one and constitute the single human being. The human soul, Ratzinger affirms, can never completely leave behind its relationship with matter. If it belongs to the very essence of the soul to be the form of the body then its ordination to matter is inescapable. Second, the

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 622-623.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 623.

⁵³ See *Ibid.*, 624.

⁵⁴ J. RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity*, 348.

⁵⁵ J. RATZINGER, *Eschatology*, 169.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

material elements of the human body are organized and formed by the expressive power of the soul with the consequence of the body being defined not in terms of matter but in terms of soul⁵⁷. Thomas Aquinas' central idea here consists in the notion of the substantial union of body and soul, "a unity founded on the creative act and implying at once the abiding ordination of the soul to matter and the derivation of the identity of the body not from matter but from the person, the soul. The physiology becomes truly 'body' through the heart of the personality. Bodiliness is something other than a summation of corpuscles"⁵⁸.

Ratzinger, in his homily from 1968, warns against taking the Assumption to mean simply that some bones and blood corpuscles are forever preserved somewhere. Again, the Assumption means something more profound: what continues to exist in heaven is not just a part of a human being (the soul, for example), while the rest is annihilated. Instead, the Assumption means that God knows and loves the *entire* person which we now are. The immortal, then, is that which is now growing and developing now in our present life and in this body of ours. This means that: "what is imperishable is whatever we have become in our present bodily state. [...] It is this 'whole man', as he has existed and lived and suffered in this world, that will one day be transformed by God's eternity and be eternal in God himself"⁵⁹. In this way, Christianity is not seen as a religion which focuses exclusively on the past, but rather, in its promise of salvation, it is a religion of hope which contemplates and opens up to the future in relation to the present: "Christianity promises that what has transpired on this earth will be eternal"⁶⁰.

Conclusion

In the first place, Ratzinger affirms that in the dogma of the Assumption, Heaven must first and foremost be determined Christologically and not as an extra-historical place into which Mary has entered. Jesus Christ, as true God and true man, makes space for human existence in the being of God himself. One is in heaven to the degree that one is in Christ: Heaven is thus a personal reality. Therefore, speaking

⁵⁷ See *Ibid.*, 178-179.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁵⁹ J. RATZINGER, *Dogma and Preaching*, 117.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

about Mary in heaven, as “clothed with the sun”, means that she lives *in* God and is *with* God. Heaven, in light of Christ’s Ascension, is defined as the contact of “man” with “God”. Mary, assumed into heaven body and soul, gives eternal worship with Christ and in Christ since he is the heavenly, cultic space for God. Heaven means participation in the new mode of Christ’s existence and the fulfillment of what was begun in us through Baptism.

Second, Ratzinger often refers to Ephesians 2:6 when speaking about the Assumption insofar as it refers to being raised up with Jesus and enthroned with him. In this way, Mary’s Assumption takes on the aspect of “anticipation”. Baptism, as union with Christ, has already achieved its full effect in Mary. Mary’s full communion with Christ also implies the body. Everything still resisting baptism has been conquered. Mary, then, fully shares, body and soul, in Christ’s victory over sin and death and participates fully in her Son’s Resurrection.

Third, Mary fully lives the promise of salvation and no longer awaits its fulfillment as does the Church⁶¹. Heaven will be complete only when all the members of the Body of Christ are gathered in. The Resurrection of the Body indicates the salvation of the human creature in its entirety: God knows and loves the entire person which we now are.

Fourth, the foundation of Mary’s Assumption is her faith (Luke 1:45) and her following of Christ. As the New Eve she follows the New Adam, Jesus Christ, in his passion and death and into heavenly glory. In this way, the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of Mary is the highest act of veneration-canonization. It is veneration of the one who is alive and has actually achieved her ultimate goal, and conquered death, in eschatological fulfillment.

Lastly, there is a strong connection between Mary’s Assumption and her maternal mediation in heaven: “Mary dwells not just in the past or in the lofty spheres of heaven under God’s immediate disposition; she is and remains present and real in this historical moment; she is a person acting here and now. Her life is not just a reality that lies behind us, nor above us; she precedes us”⁶². Christ’s mediation is not exclusive, but rather allows forms of participation. We have the task

⁶¹ See J. RATZINGER, “The Sign of the Woman”, 39: Mary’s Assumption into heaven “directs our gaze toward the great sign of hope, toward humanity’s final salvation anticipated in Mary, in whom is revealed the realm where salvation, indeed all salvation, is accomplished”.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 21.

to stand before God as persons linked to each other and responsible for each other. “We all, in different ways and in union with Jesus Christ, can be mediators for each other in our approach to God”⁶³. Mary’s mediation is based on participation in Christ’s mediation; compared to his role, hers is one of subordination. Mary’s mediation is accomplished in intercession⁶⁴. Mary’s mediation is unique because it is maternal mediation, related to Christ who is always born anew into this world. This motherhood is founded on the hearing, keeping, and doing of his word. As we find in Pope Paul VI’s *Profession of Faith*: “We believe that the most holy Mother of God, the new Eve, the Mother of the Church, carries on in heaven her maternal role with regard to the members of Christ, cooperating in the birth and development of divine life in the souls of the redeemed”.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶⁴ See *Ibid.*, 32.